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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experience of a counseling psychologist who completed a Senior Fulbright Teaching Lectureship at Moscow State Pedagogical University in Moscow, Russia from February 19 to April 24, 1992. The primary goal of the paper is to provide observations about Russian education, the status of counseling, and life in Moscow 6 months after the failed coup d'etat. Secondly, the paper is written to encourage other counseling professionals to apply for Fulbright Awards in Russia and around the world to better internationalize the counseling profession. The author was the first counseling psychologist Fulbrighter to teach Counseling Psychology in Russia and one of the first psychologists to lecture on counseling after the end of the Communist party and the feared KGB. Specific details of the Fulbright experience are enumerated including the author's teaching, research, academic placement, and relationships with Russian colleagues. Personal, professional, and political perspectives of this country in transition are given. (Author)

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A Counseling Psychologist in the USSR as a Fulbright Scholar

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Abstract

This paper describes the experience of a counseling psychologist who completed a Senior Fulbright Teaching Lectureship at Moscow State Pedagogical University in Moscow, Russia from February 19 to April 24, 1992. The primary goal of the paper is provide observations about Russian education, the status of counseling, and life in Moscow, six months after the failed coup d' etat. Secondly, the paper is written to encourage other counseling professionals to apply for Fulbright Awards in Russia and around the world to better internationalize the counseling profession. The author was the first counseling psychologist Fulbrighter to teach Counseling Psychology in Russia and one of the first psychologists to lecture on counseling after the end of Communist Party and the feared KGB. Specific details of the Fulbright experience are enumerated including the author's teaching, research, academic placement, and relationships with Russian colleagues. Personal, professional, and political perspectives of this country in transition are given.

A Counseling Psychologist in the USSR as a Fulbright Scholar

On August, 19, 1991, I was flying back from the 1991 APA Convention in San Francisco and heard disturbing news. A coup d' etat had occurred in the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev was under house arrest, the hard line Communists were in power, the world was on the edge. Historical flashbacks (1914, 1939, and 1962) entered my tired, post convention consciousness. My mood was somber. Part from the news of the Coup and part from the exhaustion of the convention. Unfortunately, I knew that the State Department would probably cancel my Fulbright Lectureship to the Soviet Union with tanks in the street and Gorbachev out of power.

I fell asleep on the plane thinking that my two year quest to teach Counseling Psychology in the Soviet Union was in jeopardy, given the gravity of the historical events in Moscow. I woke up somewhere in the Midwest, with the Coup on my mind and Yogi Berra's simplistic slogan: "It's not over until its over". The events of the Coup would still be evolving I reasoned. No one was sure what was going to happen next.

I watched CNN continuously for the next three days, as the events shaped our new world order. Over those next few days, thousands of Russians guarded Yeltsin at the White

House. On Tuesday, August 20, Yéltsin climbed up on that tank and in front of 150,000 Russian declared that freedom would not be given over to the conspirators. On that day, Communism, as we knew it, died in the former Soviet Union.

My Fulbright Lectureship was set in this historical context. Not since the 1960's had I felt the rush and vitality of being part of history. The possibility of being a participant in an evolving process of positive change and transformation in Russia gave me a special midlife energy. I decided that short of a major revolution, I would go to Moscow State Pedagogical University in the Spring of 1992 to teach Counseling Psychology.

In the brief time I will speak, I would like to share some of what happened to me as a counseling psychologist in Russia between February and April, 1992.

My most important idea is to encourage additional psychologists (particulary counseling psychologist) and counselors to consider the Fulbright Program as a way of extending American psychology around the world. I want to reinforce what other counseling psychologist Fulbrighters have reported (Hedlund, 1988; Heppner, 1988; McWhirter, 1988a, 1988b; Nugent, 1988; Skovholt, 1988) about the Fulbright program being a very important part of the internationalization of Counseling Psychology. Secondly, I want to encourage counseling psychologists and counselors to consider Russia as a primary place for their teaching, research, and ongoing consultation.

My ideas are presented in the following sections: 1) placement, colleagues, teaching, research, and lectures 2) professional insights and perspectives, 3) personal reflections.

My Placement at Moscow State Pedagogical University: Colleagues, Teaching, Research, and Lectures

Placement

My placement was at the Department of Educational Psychology of Moscow State Pedagogical University (MSPU). The university is recognized as one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Russia. Moscow State University is the other major center of learning and research. The Institute where the Department is located has a Department of Educational Psychology and a Department of Pedagogy. The primary goal of the Department of Pedagogy is to provide methods and appproaches to teaching. The Department of Educational Psychology's mission is to train teachers of psychology for highschools. They award the degree in five years and the diploma is the equivalent of our masters degree. They also train doctoral students (Candidates of Science) who aspire to become researchers or university lecturers. Since the August Coup and with increased personal freedom, there is now even greater interest in training counselors, therapists, and consultants. During my stay, the faculty was just begining to develop curricula for the applied aspects of therapeutic helping which they labeled social work. Of course, I indicated that the professions of

Counseling and Counseling Psychology could be curricular areas to consider in their course development.

Colleagues and My Sponsors

I was fortunate to be placed with Russian colleagues who were "activist psychologists", to the degree that Socialism allowed anyone to be an activist. Many of my colleagues had been involved in providing assistance to the victims of the Armenian earthquake. Others provided consultation to orphanges or were doing research in these settings. Other faculty were writing about social-familial problems such as divorce, sex education, rape, and family violence. One faculty member had been given a grant by the government to provide a year long course for the teachers of Chernobly. Many of these activities would have been prohibited a few years ago. I was able to provide a Western perspective on these problems through discussion and consultation. My primary sponsors were Dean V.A. Slastenin, Professor Valeria S. Muklina, Dr. Lubov Moshinskaya, Dr. Boris Shapiro. Nifont Dolgopolov was my research collaborator and Dr. Ludmila Popova arranged numerous lectures for me all over Moscow.

Teaching

In my Fulbright proposal, I indicated that I would teach a course called "Introduction to Counseling Psychology". The course was a survey course of the major themes covered in an introductory course in a masters degree counseling curriculum. My lectures included such topics as: 1)

definitions of counseling, 2) counselor training in the U.S., 3) characteristics of helping relationships, 4) core conditions of therapy, 5) counselor qualities, 6) goals and process of counseling, 7) career development, 8) ethics, 9) counseling skills, 10) the process of dealing with pain and psychological healing, 11) and other topics. I lectured on these topics and used movie media clips and music videos to accentuate specific course content. I used an interactive teaching model, where student's questions, comments, and critique were encouraged and integrated in the class process. I did numerous demonstrations of counseling in front of the class and encouraged student critique. I had my transparencies translated into Russian so that both Russian and English concepts would appear visually for students.

The course content on counseling had never been taught before. There are no counselor or applied psychology training programs in Russia. Psychology programs are designed to prepare teachers of psychology or academic researchers. While I was there, my colleagues were just begining to develop courses to train effective helpers and problem solvers. The government recognized a need for professionals who could help people who would end up on welfare. The lectures that I gave were directly related to the coursework, so many faculty and graduate students attended my lectures.

Research

Since research by Western psychologists had been prohibited in the past, I decided to collect data during my nine weeks. I implemented three collaborative research projects with my Russian colleagues. The first study included administering three standardized and translated questionnaires to 180 working Russian men related to their self reported gender role conflict, psychological violence, and interpersonal strain. Second, 180 college age women completed the Psychological Violence Scale (O'Neil, Owen, Egan, Murry, 1991) and one other demographic questionnaire. Third, I interviewed 5 Russian psychologists on their perceptions of Russian men's gender role conflict. These psychologists filled out a self report questionnaires and were interviewed. The interviews were audio taped, translated, and a transcribed. Finally, a two hour group discussion was conducted, taped, and transcribed. The data for these projects are currently being analyzed.
These research projects were very helpful in developing positive and collaborative relationships with my colleagues that will extend far beyond my stay in Moscow.

Lectures Outside the University

I also gave numerous lectures outside the university in Russian Academy of Science, Russian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and institutions in Moscow and St. St. Petersburg. These lectures were at the Institute of General and Educational Psychology (Russian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences), Psychological Society of Traumatic

Stress of Moscow, The Palace of Creativity, Moscow State University, Moscow Medical Academy, A.I. Herzen Russian Pedagogical University (St. Petersburg), Moscow Centre for Gender Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences). I also gave a 3 day, 18 hour workshop for the teachers of Chernobly on counseling, victimization, and gender roles. I visited numerous schools, an orphanage, Hospital No. 20 that had an inpatient crises unit for suicidal men and women, one of the only marriage and family therapy clinics in Moscow where I observed two therapy sessions of one of the clincians. My "cultural program", as my colleagues described it included many visits to musuems, art galleries, the Bolshoi Ballet, the conservatory, a peasant village and visits to 12 Russian homes for dinner or tea. Many of these families had never had an American in their home, so it was an significant event for them and very stimulating for me.

Professional Perspectives and Insights

There has been a psychological gap between the the former Soviet Union and the West for nearly 50 years. The two sides have been isolated from each other's reality. It is very difficult to make many intelligent generalizations about the status of psychology or life in Russia these days, given the rapid pace of change there.

Additionally, the historical progression of psychology under Socialist control needs to be understood before any conclusions can be drawn. Whenever I felt some "truth" was emerging on the status of Russian psychology, there would be

a glaring exception or some counter truth would emerge. I experienced many paradoxes and contradictions. I experienced what Kosulin (1984) wrote: "Anyone who has ever approached the study of Soviet psychology knows that the subject is intrinsically paradoxical" (p.1). It is nearly impossible to use Western standards to make many assessments about Russian Psychology or the people and their life.

With these reservations in mind, I will enumerate some of my impressions and what my colleagues reported about the state of psychology in transition in Russia. Some of these points will have direct relevance to Counseling Psychology and other points will be pertinent to American Psychology in general.

1. Like every Russian institution, Russian psychology is in transition. There appears to be more academic freedom and much less state control of academic life with the reality of glasnost and the end of the Communist Party and the KGB.

2. Russian Psychology has been significantly affected by the tenets of Socialism and the heritage of the Russian culture. How the cultural and political realities have interacted over the decades and produced the current status of Russain psychology deserves intense study and analysis. Most psychological theories had to conform to the Communist Party's position. As Kosulin (1984) point out the psychological concepts of Russian psychologists are "buried under layers of idealogical verbiage". Academic freedom was

very limited or non existent in the past. Yet, if you can decode (read between the lines) the theories of Russian Psychology, recognizing that theoreticians had to cover their ideological trials to continue their work, there are many substantial psychological concepts that deserve consideration by Western psychologists (Joravsky, 1989; Lomov, 1982; Petrovsky, 1990). Numerous theories were publicly discredited and ban over the decades. Some of these theories were revived at later times.

3. Some or maybe many of the philosophies and basic premises of Counseling Psychology are diamterically opposed to cherished Socialist principles and therefore Russian psychology. For example, individual differences, free choice, self determination, using one's own potential, data based assessment of personality and individual differences, self determination, the unconscious, all have at some time during the last century been considered to be politically incorrect.

4. Russian Psychology has been highly theoretical and research oriented. There are some exceptions, like in the area of defectology, psychophysiology, and neuropsychology. Overall, the practical use of psychology, beyond the state's use of it to control behavior, has not been very strong.

5. Mental health services, like we have in the West, have not existed. The exception is psychiatry's complicity with the Communist State in incarsarating and drugging political disidents and the mentally retarded patients.

6. Like in America, but to a greater degree, counseling and psychotherapy are stigmatized processes. "Therapeutic help", Russian style, has really consisted of political and personal control of individuals. This has been psychiatry's domain. All reports indicated that this kind of help has been politically motivated and oppressive. One of the tasks of the new "glasnost therapist and psychologists" is to differentiate their therapy from the terror and abuses of many psychiatrists.

7. There are currrently no formal training programs that train counseling, clinical, or school psychologists. There are no specific courses in counseling or psychotherapuetic skills. Discussions are currently underway at Moscow State University, Moscow State Pedagogical University and other institutions to develop training programs.

8. There are about 100 active therapists in Moscow. They have developed the Association of Practical Psychologist to develop their profession. Most practicing psychologist have no formal training in counseling or psychotherapy beyond psychological theory and workshops that they have attended in Russia or abroad. Gindis (1992) points out that private psychotherapy and training workshops are not a completely new phenomenon and have been described as "shadow psychology" and conducted underground. The current cost of one session of therapy ranged from 25 rubles to 5,000 rubles which is quite a sliding scale. The therapist

who said he charged 5,000 rubles per session for one of his clients, indicated that this person was a millionnaire and a very rare exception. He indicated the average range for Moscow therapists was between 25 - 500 rubles.

9. Russian psychology does not have an ethical code that guides either their teaching, research, or therapeutic practice.

10. There are no student services or counseling centers that I could identify in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

11. There are few standarized methods of personality assessment (as we know them in the West) beyond observation and the use of social histories and interviews. There are well developed qualitiative approaches to assessing children. In Educational Psychology, the concept of "dynamic assessment" is used. Gindus (1992) indicates that this approach "is not directed primarily at classification of students, but at the discovery of problem-solving stategies. Quanitative approaches to assessing intelligence and other personality characteristics violated Socialist principles and therefore were prohibited. Assessing individual differences violated the Socialist principles that every one is the same. Numerous psychometric instruments were mentioned as being recently adapted and translated into Russian.

12. There is a great interest in the theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy. Since there has been prohibition on developing therapy services and mostly just

the study of the theories of psychotherapy, there is a great interest in "How to do therapy".

13. Since counseling and therapy are not accepted services and money is very tight, many therapists are currently doing consultation and outreach programs to supplement their therapy practices.

14. Russian psychologists have limited data on the severity of mental health problems in Russia. Data is just begining to be gathered and now is supported by the government. For example, it was reported that there are 20,000 orphans in Moscow alone. It was also reported (and I confirmed through four other sources) that over 15,000 young military trainees die each year during their training. Additonally, data on suicide indicates that it is on a rapid rise. There is very limited data on rape, wife battering, family violence, incest, alcoholism, depression, child abuse, and sexual behavior.

15. Ethnic and race related tensions among Russian people were apparent from my discussions with psychologists. AntiSemitism is a reality and resentments (i.e. racism) towards other ethnic groups (i.e. Moslems) are now being discussed openly. Cross cultural psychology, as we know it in the West, could definitively be helpful in understanding the intergroup dynamics that are now more out in the open.

16. Topics like Post Trauamtic Stress Syndrome (PTST) and Feminist issues are being discussed in Russia. There is

now more freedom to pursue a wide spectrum of psychological topics that only a few years go would have been prohibited.

17. There has been control over what Russian psychologists have read from the West. Freud was not read for years without special permission. Other Western psychological concepts that went against Socialist principles were not able to be studied.

18. There has been no sex education in the Former Soviet Union. Sexaul freedom and expression is a current issue that many Russians are discussing. Homosexuality is still against the law. There was a public demonstration while I was there protesting this law that discriminates against homosexuals.

19. Public education, particularly in the first six grades, was described by most of my colleagues as authoritarian, rigid, punitive, and abusive toward children. Most of the children and adults I met, reported their educational experiences as negative and unhealthy for their personal and professional development. The methods of teaching appear to be rigid and based on pressure tactics to instill learning through rote memory and the use of fear and sometimes physical abuse. There were some exceptions to this approach in both private and state schools. For example, I visited the Palace of Creativity (The old Pioneer Palace) which provided excellent opportunities for creative and progessive educational processes. Educational reform, particularly teacher educational reform, is a critical issue for Russia as they move to a more free society.

20. Research is conducted in Russia, but in the past most topics, including dissertation topics, have been reviewed and controlled by the state. This is a good example of the lack of academic freedom. Research facilities are underdeveloped in Russia and raw materials like paper, photocopy, and computers to conduct research are very scarse. Most Ph.D. level psychologists take courses in research design and statistics, but there many limitations in conducting research without computers and other resources.

The above observations are my first attempt to capture the professional insights from my Fulbright experience. Clearly, these initial ideas will evolve more over the months ahead. Of greatest interest is how Counseling Psychology and other specialities in American psychology can be useful to Russian Psychology as it evolves with the market economy.

Russian life and the people are full of paradoxes and contradictions that are not easily understood by the Western mind. Like Lindy and van der Kolk, (1991), I experienced some individuals as "living in the double", meaning that there were two separate personalities within the same person that could be activated depending on the situation. One personality to conform to the politically correct Socialist principles and another one that reflected their own personal viewpoints. A number of contacts admitted that this dual personality was very common and a product of the Soviet

state's continuous monitoring of individuals. I suspect that this separation of personalities or double life was not as strong as even last year. The disbanding of the KGB and the end of the Communist party has done much to reassure people that they can be themselves without fear of harrassment. Yet, this double life has been operating for many decades and raises special clinical questions how Russians handle their interpersonal relations and conflicts.

To understand the Russian personality, one has to understand Russian culture before and after the 1917 Revolution. Additionally, knowledge of Leninism, Marxism, Socialism, and Communism are essential to understand the complexity of Russian life. There are also generational differences to be considered. Those who lived through Stalin's purges and the second World War are clearly different than those who have been exposed to glasnost as young people.

Adding to the complexity, are the ethnic, class, religious, geographic, and language differences of this vast country. There are over 100 different ethnic groups and languages in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, if you add to this the present rate of economic, social, and political change of the last two years, and you have a society "living on the edge".

For example, the prices for most everything has increase 25 times since the Coup. Freedom is a political reality, but not internalized in people's behavior. The

feared KGB has been disbanded, but people still have these jobs.

The country has been turned upside down over the last seven years. The Soviet Union has lost its: name, flag, political idealogy, leaders and land, a stable currency, and in a profound sense its national identity. The questions that most every Russian is facing is what does it mean to be a Russian and what is Russia? I sensed a need for Russians to come to terms with their history. A history that has been denied them for so many years. I sensed a quest for their roots and true national identity. There was the mixed quest for the nostalgia and safety of the past and desperate attempts to adjust to the present and plan for the unknown future.

All of this was being experienced by people who had their structured lives protected by an authoritarian government. The Socialist state took care of their every need: food, shelter, leisure and a politically correct way to view reality. But not anymore! One Russian psychologist told a group in my living room "...that we Russians are now like children; we have been socialized to be taken care of, but we now have to learn how to take care of ourselves. But we don't know how to assert ourselves, take risks, make decisions" (Popova, 1992). In a market economy, people have to take care of themselves and compete with others. Most everyone I met accepted (in varying degrees) that they had to learn to change their perspectives on themselves, learn

new skills, and become responsible for their lives in ways that was very foreign to them. How to handle these personal transitions appeared to be the most prevalent psychological issue and challenge for the people. There was also shame, anger, and guilt about the past, mixed with fear and anxiety about the future. Under these conditions, therapists are definitely needed in this changing society.

Personal Reflections

The Fulbright experience was the most stimulating professional activity of my career. The entire process of preparing to go, internalizing what I experienced, and then returning altered me personally, professionally, and politically. The preparation process and the trip itself stretched me to my capacity both personally and professionally. This is exactly what I needed at this point in my career. The Fulbright experience gave me a challenge, disrupted my paradigms, and forced me to take a deep look at exactly what I am teaching, the kind of research I am doing, and I what I believe in nearly 20 years after completing my doctorate. In some ways, it radicalized me; something my friends say I do not need. Yet, if you asked what I mean "radicalize me", I would not be able to fully articulate these dimensions yet.

In preparing to teach Counseling Psychology concepts, in a cross cultural context, I had to ask myself some very fundamental questions about my professional premises for this culture and how they might (or might not) translate to

Russia. Furthermore, I had to prepare myself for relating to a society's culture that was foreign to me and that I had biases about. I can still vividly remember the monthly air raid drills in the 1950's in school. It was the Russians who I was told would be dropping the bombs.

Since I didn't speak Russian, there was the struggle (and ultimate failure) to learn the Russian language. This was a learning experience in itself. The difficult struggle of learning and the emotions of facing the unknown were revisited as an adult. I had to psychologically prepare myself for the language limitation. I was able to leave America without feeling defensive or embarrassed. I was able to turn this limitation into a positive, by directly communicating my language struggle and failure. This made me human to my Russian hosts and cast off any preconception of the mighty, invincible, and perfect American.

James In Wonderland

My colleagues in Russia titled my 9 weeks there as "James In Wonderland". They evoked this title when our educational process got "screwed up" because the system was not working right or some event had abruptly changed our plans. This title also represented my Russian colleagues' own helpless feelings about coping with the dailey challenges during these difficult and transitory times.

Russia is indeed a wonderland these days with so much rapid change. Like Alice in Wonderland, I was in awe of what I observed. A wonderland, by definition, presupposes few

truths. As mentioned earlier, I was unable to capture many truths that have any validity or would not be more than just superficial platitudes. I left the country with more questions than actual answers. There were too many unexplainable pheneomena and paradoxes to make generalizations that would approximate any sense of truth. As a psychologist, I have been trained to identify and assess paradoxes and help people find their own truth. There were many people who came to me, in an informal way, to seek their truth, through my Western mind set. Although we had some very good exhanges and mutually gratifying support existed, I was at a loss to help them understand the multiple paradoxes and contradictions in their lives.

Rather than seek truths or try to untangle the paradoxes, I embraced the wonderment of these unpredictable times in Russia with my Russian friends and colleagues. Entering this psychological space, increased my wonder and compassion for the struggle that is occurring in every person and institution in the former Soviet Union.

There is much to wonder about in terms of the future of Russia and much us Westerners have to learn about their history and culture. I left with much less wonder about the Russian people. I gained a deep respect for the Russian people and their rich culture. I was personally touched by the art, the culture, and the people. The Russian soul is not shallow and the language colorful and vivid. The personalities are energetic and generous, their compassion

very visible, their humanity very alive. Encountering these qualities in many people, stimulated the question of how is America faring with these same qualities?

Furthermore, I ask myself "What altered me and produced such a sense of awe from my experience." What produced such intense interest by American colleagues before I left and after I returned? Why did I leave so puzzled? What really prohibits me from making many generalizations about my experiences there? Why such a strong reaction to my trip? One question that was asked by Russians does begin to shed some light on some of these questions.

Numerous Russians kept asking "Why do Americans want to come here? What is the interest about? Why do they keep coming back? What is it all about? We don't get it! Is it ecomonic gain, political self interest, curosity about the "Evil Empire", exposure to the unknown? Exactly what is the interest about?

It was a fundamental question. I said I wasn't sure. All of the reason may have some validity. Their questions made me reflect back on the "James In Wonderland" in a different way. This time the wonderland was my own country, the United States. America is also a wonderland these days with its many contradictions, paradoxes, economic failings, rapid change, and widespread and overt violence.

I asked myself what changes in America might be producing such as avid interest in Russia? What is the

relationship between changes and problems in America and the changes and problems in Russia?

My response is that changes in both societies have many differences, but also a common base. Most Americans know that a profound renewal and transformation is occurring in Russia and all of Eastern Europe. I believe that Americans know on some conscious or unconscious level that an archetypal and historical process of how a nation and a people change and renew themselves is occurring in Russia.

In a similiar way, Americans know deep in their psyches that they also have to engage in renewal and transformation, if they are to survive in this new global, interdependent world order. Americans know that Russians have something to teach them on how to transform fear, suffering, and lost identity into something that soothes the human soul. They have been doing this for decades. The Russian soul has endured decades of oppression and violence and now has to turn that history into a free and peaceful coexistence with each other and the rest of the world.

Although America does not have that same history, we have the same challenge of personal and institutional renewal and transformation. My sense is that on a deeper level, Americans are drawn to the Russian experience because we understand our own need to be renewed and transformed.

I know that my trip to Moscow renewed and tranformed me and whatever transformation that occurs in my life will be directly linked to the many courageous Russians that shared

their homes and souls with me during those 65 days in wonderland.

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